

mahlum

Muckleshoot Tribal School | Muckleshoot Indian Tribe | Auburn, Washington

The Muckleshoot Tribal School was built on a new campus, replacing an existing facility of portables and aging buildings. High school drop-out rates and the fact that many of the Tribe's students were choosing to attend other schools in the region led to plans for a new K-12 campus endowed with a strong sense of cultural identity.

The school is composed of four buildings housing elementary, middle, and high school programs, and shared programs including the library, gym, dining and performance spaces. Inspired by the simple forms of the cedar longhouses characteristic to the Puget Sound region, the buildings were organized as a village around landscaped raingardens, outdoor learning, and views to Mt. Rainier.

Creating a strong sense of community ownership and cultivating traditional teachings were key design goals for the Muckleshoot Tribal School. It represents a significant investment from the Tribe, both financial and emotional, in the future of their children. The school would accommodate each student's learning style through small class size, individualized instruction and a variety of alternative learning spaces supplementing the traditional classrooms. It was critical to cultivate the students' sense of ownership and independence, particularly for the middle and high school age groups. Dedicated study lounges were programmed and hands-on learning settings were given greater emphasis for each of these age groups

Community spaces range in scale from an elders' story-telling circle in the library to a large assembly area that will support an annual potlatch of up to 1,500 people for dining and performance. The heart of the campus is the main courtyard, decorated with the pattern of a Muckleshoot basket, for large gatherings and community events. Carved into a landscaped berm around this space, a small amphitheatre accommodates smaller groups. The design grew rich in symbolism encouraging students, teachers, and staff to become knowledgeable about the Tribe's history and traditions, and link students with the natural world and resource conservation.

Plants that were traditionally used by the Muckleshoot as food, shelter, craft, medicine, and seasonal indicators were given special attention and can be found throughout the courtyards and out in the wetlands beyond the playfields. As the plantings mature, students will be able to add new plants to this growing forest. Since the school opened, the staff and students have already begun planning a raised garden for students to try their hand at horticulture, as well as for supplying fresh produce for school lunches.

Classrooms are flooded with natural light from skylights, operable windows, and generous transoms at the corridors. The project recently achieved LEED for Schools Silver certification. In addition to low-impact site design strategies, healthy materials with significant recycled content, and locally sourced materials were used when available. The project earned all ten energy savings credits, due to the combination of energy efficient mechanical systems and daylighting. The building form was developed to allow effective daylighting and to harness the consistent breezes on the site through the natural ventilation stacks on the roofs. During cooler months when the operable windows will remain closed, mechanical ventilation brings in the fresh air, tempered by central heat recovery air handlers in each building.